



Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Larry J. Wilson Director

To: Pauline Drobney

From: Bill Bunger

Date: 01/07/98

RE: Jackrabbits



White-tailed Jackrabbit Relocation

Bill Bunger

1 December, 1997

At the request of the Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge and per agreement with Richard Bishop, Bureau Chief, the upland wildlife research team from the Boone station, will attempt to relocate white-tailed jackrabbits to the refuge area this winter. The initial planning has been completed at this time and a trial run is scheduled for the week of January 12th with the actual day of the 16th the most likely.

The most productive capture method found in the literature involves running 2- 150 meter leads at a 45 degree angle to one another down into a small corral with netting strung inside for the animals to become entangled in to prevent them from repeatedly running into the fence and possibly injuring themselves. This procedure requires some knowledge of the local rabbits habits, hangouts and escape routes when pushed. Therefore, the rabbits are run down natural escape routes with the leads and trap along that route, rather than trying to push animals where they don't want to go.

Corralled animals will be placed into burlap bags and then placed into transport boxes designed for turkeys. Animals loosely confined and in the dark should remain more calm and less likely to injure themselves especially with a cardboard box versus a wire cage. Upon release, 5 animals will be fitted with a transmitter collar so that if mortality occurs, causes may be determined. In addition, all animals will contain a small ear tag stamped with Iowa DNR and the Boone station phone number. The goal is to release a minimum of 6 rabbits, 2 males and 4 females. If more animals are caught, then up to 12 individuals may be moved.

Preliminary work at one of the ISU research farms near Ames has verified the presence of at least 8 rabbits with some indication more are present. Complaints from individuals with test plots on this area prompted a study by ISU ecology students who counted as many as 32 rabbits during this past growing season. These numbers may disperse some after crop harvest and tillage, but the desire to reduce the numbers and the proximity to the Boone station makes this a good area to test our work. Another location will be at the Spencer airport. Like most such institutions, foreign and especially mobile objects on runways are undesirable. Some preliminary work has found as many as 18 rabbits on this area during a one night spotlight survey. This will be the area we concentrate more of our efforts on. However, I have two other potential sights lined up. We feel a relocation of animals from 2 or 3 places may be more beneficial from a genetic standpoint.

Telemetry work is scheduled to be done primarily by Walnut Creek personnel. A receiver and hand-held antenna will be furnished by the Boone station. Telemetry training, as needed, will be provided by the Boone station. If we look strictly at survival/mortality of these animals, time per telemetry session

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should be minimal. That would be particularly true if working with a relatively sedentary species. However, like most prairie species, they are by nature mobile. In addition, relocating these animals may cause more uncertainty. Theoretically, they could all disappear from the refuge area within a few hours or days. If this happens with any or all of them, it will become necessary to decide how much time is available for personnel to spend searching for dispersed animals. This will be up to staff at the refuge.

If a transmitter is determined to be on mortality mode, someone experienced should walk in on the animal to hopefully determine cause of death. Ideally, each animal should be checked daily for a signal to determine survival. If the animals are relatively immobile, this could take only 30-60 minutes. In the more likely event that animals spread out, it could take up to 2 hours just to get signals on all animals. Again, if animals disperse far and wide and time is spent to successfully find these animals, drive time between individually dispersed animals could start to add up. As this is not a fully funded project, it is my feeling that telemetry time is given due consideration but will be limited by staff available. I will try to make myself available the first 2 or 3 days to check animals with trainees. Telemetry is not an exact science and can be frustrating, even after hundreds of hours of contact.

This is a brief overview of the project. Included is a potential itinerary, subject to mother nature, the animals and Murphy's Law.

1 December, 1997 - 9 January, 1998:

- Literature reviewed.
- Materials for trapping purchased.
- Transmitters refurbished.
- Ear tags ordered.
- Potential sites evaluated first hand.

5 January - 9 January, 1998

ISU research farm site closely surveyed, animals located and patterned.

12 January - 16 January, 1998

ISU animals patterned, a test drive of area and hopefully capture by end of the week.
2 animals will be moved from this site if captured.

19 January - 23 January, 1998

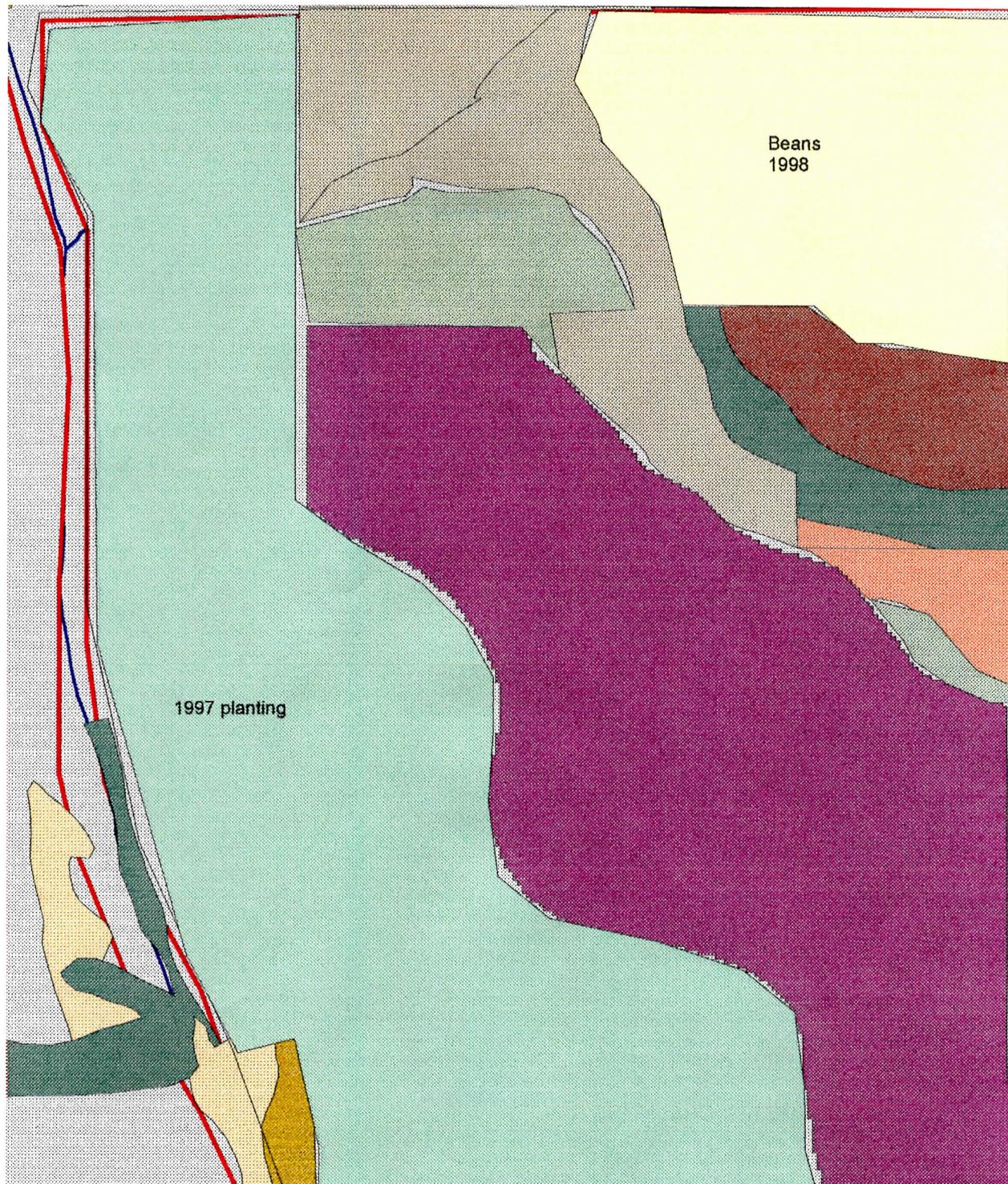
Spencer airport will be closely surveyed and animals potentially caught by weeks end.

Things will be reevaluated at this time and schedules updated.



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Proposed Jack Rabbit Release Site



- 1994 planting
- Natural Vegetation
- Prairie
- Relict Prairie
- Brome
- Savanna Wetland
- Wooded Gully
- Reed Canary Grass
- Survey Unit
- Roads
- Streams
- Refuge Boundary

This site is the Middle Burn Unit.
 Total acres: 390
 1997 planting acres: 160
 1994 planting acres: 70
 Brome: 55
 Relict Prairie: 15
 Wooded: 10
 Crop land: 80